DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 083 CE 075 921

TITLE	Career Advancement: Should I Return to School? ICPAC Information Series.
INSTITUTION	Indiana Career and Postsecondary Advancement Center, Bloomington.
REPORT NO	ICPAC-IS-59
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Indiana Career and Postsecondary Advancement Center, 2805 East 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408; toll-free phone: 800-992-2076; web address (updated annually): http://icpac.indiana.edu
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Students; *Career Development; College Admission; *College Programs; *Education Work Relationship; Higher Education; *Nontraditional Students; Occupational Aspiration; Paying for College; *Promotion (Occupational); Reentry Students; *Student College Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses what type, if any, of additional education employees might need for career advancement, and how to obtain that education if it is deemed necessary. Information provided includes the following: questions to ask of college admissions offices, transferring credits, checking out employer educational benefits, determining financial impact, planning ahead, and what one can do with different types of degrees. (KC)

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Career Advancement: Should I Return to School?

What is Career Advancement?

There are many reasons why adults return to school. One of the major reasons is advancement. Advancement may mean different things to different people. It may mean entering the workforce, receiving a title change, promotion or salary increase in a present job, or obtaining a new job or additional responsibilities. Advancement sometimes requires more education or training. You must decide if the benefits of advancement are worth the cost and effort.

You may begin your career with or without a high school diploma or GED, with a certificate or associates degree, or with a four year college degree behind you. Whatever your personal situation, there are several questions you should answer in order to decide if further training or education can be worthwhile for you.

What Will It Take?

Find out if you need additional education or training to obtain your advancement. You might ask your boss, coworkers, and/or the human resources department if work experience is sufficient or if coursework is needed. If you need coursework, find out what kind of training or education is necessary.

Where Can I Complete the Training or Education I Need?

Ask people at your place of work where they received their training and if they would recommend the same program to you. If you want a different career, talk with people in that field. Feel free to call ICPAC and request "Worksheet for Visiting a Job Site" (IS-49). Check your public library for guides to schools. Call ICPAC for information about 2- and 4-year colleges, proprietary schools in Indiana, and educational requirements for occupations. Contact local colleges, as they may also provide helpful information.

What are the Next Steps?

Contact the Admissions Offices

Narrow your choices for education and training to two or three schools. Then, contact the admissions offices and get the details on the schools and the programs which interest you. When deciding on a program, make sure the courses you need are offered at the location you prefer. Are classes offered through videotape, television, at a local community center or local extension campus? Ask how many courses you will need. Can this program be finished in weeks, months or years? Will you be able to take courses part-time, full-time, in the evenings, on the weekends, or by correspondence (through the mail)? Do not stop asking questions until you have all the answers you need.

Now ask about admission requirements. As an adult, you may need to meet less competitive requirements than students right out of high school. There are several things to keep in mind when going through the admissions process.

- **Information needed by the school about your previous education or training.**
  - -Ask about sending transcripts from all the schools you have attended, including high school and beyond.
  - -Do these transcripts need to be official copies or are unofficial copies accepted? If you do not have your high school diploma, will the school accept a GED (General Education Development Test)?

- **Does the school require admissions tests?**
  - -If so, which ones? Tests may include the ACT (American College Testing Program Examination), the SAT (Scholastic Assessment [formerly: *Aptitude*] Test), or tests specific to the school.

- **Can I get a "jumpstart"? There are several ways in which this may be done.**
  - -Can I transfer credits from another school?
  - - Ask about using AP (Advance Placement) credits, credits for life experience, or CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) in place of some required or elective courses.
  - -Will credits from former certificates or degrees transfer to the new school?
  - -Can you receive credits for military training/course work or for on-the-job training?

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•**Do I need to write an admission essay?**
-You may be asked to describe your reasons for pursuing the degree program, your plans upon completion of the program, and/or discuss your relevant skills and experience. Contact ICPAC for help. We can send you "Writing the College Admission Essay" (IS-15).

•**If there is an application fee, can it be waived?**
-Some schools have an application fee which is submitted with application materials. You may wish to ask if and when it can be waived.

•**When is the application deadline?**
-Be sure to submit all of your information on time. Call the admissions offices to make sure the schools have received all parts of your application.

Ask Your Employer about Educational Benefits.

Talk with your boss or the personnel department to explore the following questions. Can you work a flexible schedule, if necessary, so that you are able to attend class? Does your employer have a tuition reimbursement plan for its employees? If so, how many classes will the plan pay for each semester or quarter? Do you need to receive a certain grade or score in the class to receive the financial reimbursement? Are there employer scholarships or educational loans for which you are eligible?

Is It Worth It?

Once you have gathered all of the information you need, weigh the pros and cons of additional training. Is the advancement worth the cost in dollars and time? You may want to call ICPAC and request that a Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) be sent to you. To determine the financial impact of your return to school, begin by preparing a budget. Include things such as tuition and fees, books, additional transportation, as well as child care and housing, if needed. The Financial Aid Office at the school you are planning to attend can give you its "standard budget" for adult students with or without families. Also, ask the Financial Aid Office about your eligibility for financial aid and request all of the necessary forms to complete. For most financial aid programs, financial need must be demonstrated. This need is determined as the difference between what it costs to attend college and what you (and your spouse) can pay toward those expenses. For more information on financial aid, call ICPAC and ask for "The ICPAC Financial Aid Guide for Adult Students" (IS-56).

Plan Ahead.

Be sure to plan ahead. Make it as simple as possible to pursue more education and to advance to a higher level job. Keep your options open. For example, your present goal may be to complete a one-year Licensed Practical Nurse degree. Later, you may want to pursue a Registered Nurse degree. It may or may not be possible to transfer credits from the first degree to the second. Ask this question **before** you begin class work so you can attend a school which accepts the transfer credits in case you decide later to begin another degree. If you want to transfer credits, there are several things to keep in mind and steps to take:

•Credits transfer differently from school to school and from program to program (within the same school).

•If you would like to begin your education at one school and transfer - or complete a second degree at another school, maintain contact between both schools in order to determine which credits will be accepted at both schools. For example, you may want to begin with a certificate program at one school and complete an associates degree elsewhere. Maintain contact with your academic advisor at the first school and the Admissions Office at the second school. In other words, make sure you know the steps you need to take to reach your goals and how the intermediate steps will help you reach your final goal.

•Once you enroll in an academic program, you have many resources available to answer your educational and occupational questions. You may want to use some of these resources: ICPAC, your academic advisor, the Admissions Office, the Career Planning and Placement Office on campus, or the Office of Returning Students on your campus.

What Can I Do With Different Types of Degrees?

On the following pages, clusters of occupations are grouped by career field and by education level. These may give you an idea of some options to consider. The careers are listed under the minimum education required. **After achieving one level, you may be able to advance to a higher level in your career field by completing more education.** Further education may lead to greater job responsibilities or a promotion. This is **only** a brief list of occupational possibilities that are available to you. Wherever you are in your educational path, keep the above steps in mind as they will help you make decisions that are right for you.